



Nearly 236,800 Acres Added to Ag Enterprise Areas

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Editors note: Local contacts for new and expanded AEAs are listed at the end of this release.

MADISON – Wisconsin will be three-quarters of the way to its goal of 1 million acres in agricultural enterprise areas when Secretary of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Ben Brancel signs orders creating three new AEAs and expanding an existing one.

The new agricultural enterprise areas, or AEAs, total about 235,800 acres in seven counties and 24 towns and one tribal reservation, with 216 landowners petitioning for the designation, which will become official Jan. 1. Wisconsin now has 25 agricultural enterprise areas statewide, totaling almost 750,000 acres in 19 counties, 72 towns, and one reservation.

This is the fourth round of AEA designations. The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection can designate up to 1 million acres as AEAs. Local landowners, with support of local governments, must seek the designation.

"We encourage landowners in these areas to apply for farmland preservation agreements. Other landowners who want to participate in this program will have a chance to submit a petition in the 2014 petition cycle," Secretary Brancel said.

AEAs are part of Wisconsin's farmland preservation program. They are intended to encourage preservation of agricultural land use and to promote agricultural economic development appropriate to each area. Landowners in AEAs are not subject to any new land use regulations. Farmers owning land within an AEA can receive tax credits in exchange for signing an agreement to keep their land in agricultural use for at least 15 years.

The new and expanded AEAs are:

Fields, Waters and Woods AEA, Ashland and Bayfield counties and the Bad River Reservation This new AEA totals 41,089 acres in portions of the towns of Marengo, Ashland, and White River in Ashland County; the Town of Kelly in Bayfield County; and the Bad River Reservation. The goals include maintaining the agricultural land base to support agricultural growth and diversification, minimizing conflict between agricultural and residential land use, strengthening the current dairy and beef industries while fostering other types of agriculture, exploring production and processing of oilseed crops to reduce fuel and protein expenses, and modernizing facilities. There is already a joint marketing effort in the area among producers of grass-fed beef, lamb and poultry, as well as investment in processing facilities for vegetables, fruits, honey, maple syrup and meat.

Heart of America's Dairyland AEA, Clark and Marathon counties This expands an existing AEA by 66,467 acres, bringing the covered area to 164,451 acres in the towns of Mayville, Colby, Unity, Beaver, Loyal in Clark County; and Brighton, Hull, Frankfort, Holton and Johnson in Marathon County. The AEA petitioners want to preserve the region's agricultural heritage, assure production capacity, assess and protect environmental resources, and provide tools to minimize conversion of farmland to non-farm uses. They also aim to develop markets for local products. This AEA received the Top Rural Development Initiative Award from Wisconsin Rural Partners earlier this year.

AG ENTERPRISE AREAS – ADD ONE

Southwest Lead Mine Region AEA, Lafayette County This new AEA covers 102,325 acres in the towns of Gratiot, Monticello, Shullsburg and Wiota. Agriculture accounts for 85 percent of business sales in Lafayette County, and 13 dairy processing plants serve farmers in this region. The AEA's goals include supporting multi-generational farming, using land use tools to protect the historic character of the area, attracting cottage agricultural industries, expanding local food processing and marketing, encouraging renewable energy technologies for farm operations and rural areas, and establishing demonstration projects for sustainable watershed management and resource conservation.

Town of Grant AEA, Dunn and Chippewa counties This is also new, encompassing 25,908 acres in the towns of Grant, Colfax, Sand Creek, Otter Creek, Auburn and Cooks Valley. Row crops and dairying dominate agriculture in this region. Along with maintaining and developing the agriculture infrastructure, AEA goals include preserving farmland and implementing stronger land use protections, developing an agricultural succession plan to reduce barriers to business expansions and startups, and identifying new markets and new uses for agricultural products and by-products.

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Local contacts for 2013 agricultural enterprise areas

Fields, Waters and Woods AEA: Jason Fischbach, 715-373-6104, jason.fischbach@ces.uwex.edu

Heart of America's Dairyland AEA: Diane Wessel, diane.wessel@co.marathon.wi.us, 715-261-6000; Matt Zoschke, 715-743-5285, matt.zoschke@co.clark.wi.us

Southwest Lead Mine Region AEA: Halfway Creek Prairie AEA: Roger Lange, 608-776-3836, roger.lange@wi.nacdnet.net

Town of Grant AEA: Bob Colson, 715-231-6411, rcolson@co.dunn.wi.us